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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 001971

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SUBJECT: GOI JOINT SECRETARY (EAST ASIA): CHINA BORDER
TALKS MAKE LITTLE PROGRESS, DPRK VISIT IS ROUTINE, AND
SUPPORT FOR INFORMAL FOUR-WAY TALKS

Classified By: PolCouns Ted Osius for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary. In an April 25 discussion, new MEA JS (East Asia) Vijay Gokhale:

- briefed PolCouns on the latest round of India-China border talks, saying little progress was made;
- downplayed the May 1 visit by North Korean Vice-Foreign Minister Kim Hyong Jun, stating such a meeting was an annual event and that India was sensitive to U.S. and Japanese concerns; and
- supported the concept of informal, senior official-level talks between the U.S., India, Japan and Australia.

End Summary.

Border Talks: No Significant Progress

¶2. (C) Recently-installed Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Joint Secretary (East Asia) Vijay Gokhale provided PolCouns with a readout of the ninth round of India-China border talks, which ended April 22. Responding to PolCouns' inquiry as to whether there had been any progress, Gokhale said "not really," but quickly added that the Indian government had not expected significant progress, noting that discussions have been continuing for over 30 years. As the two sides work out a framework for an agreement, he explained, trying to negotiate specific details causes the pace of talks to slow. Gokhale intimated that India's approach to the talks depend on a bilateral approach whereby the border issue should not detract from other aspects of the India-China relationship, but felt China's strategy likely involved a broader angle. According to Gokhale China negotiated the border issue with its broader regional relationships -- particularly with Japan -- in mind.

¶3. (C) Gokhale's assessment was echoed by Chinese Embassy PolCouns Sun Weidong, who downplayed progress in the border talks in a conversation with Poloff April 24. Saying "the strategic dimension of the negotiations cannot be ignored," Sun agreed little progress was made between negotiators Indian National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan and Chinese

Vice-Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo. He added that both sides agreed to be closed mouthed about the talks, as it distracts from negotiations when leaked to the media.

Visit By DPRK Vice-Minister "Routine"

14. (C) PolCouns asked Gokhale about a recent press report saying India will resume foreign office consultations with North Korea in May. (Note: Ambassador raised this issue with Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon last week, but received no substantive response. End Note.) Gokhale confirmed Vice-Foreign Minister Kim Hyong Jun will visit New Delhi on May 1 for talks with MEA Secretary N. Ravi, but quickly asserted that this meeting was part of an annual meeting between the Indian Secretary and the DPRK Vice-Foreign Minister going back 25 years. Gokhale admitted that, at the DPRK request, the 2006 meeting did not take place. Gokhale explained that this meeting was India's and North Korea's only mechanism for bilateral talks, and India did not want to close off its dialogue process. India is sensitive to U.S. and Japanese concerns about such a visit, he said, and therefore will not give Kim access to any higher level Indian officials, nor will there be any joint statements. PolCouns urged Gokhale to consider the negative perceptions India's meeting would likely elicit, and stressed the poor timing of such a meeting, given North Korea's continued intransigence in foregoing its nuclear ambitions and in implementing Six-Party Talks agreements. He also said India could send a better signal by refusing a "business as usual" approach to the DPRK, but Gokhale reiterated that India's preference was to keep dialogue open with the DPRK regime. Gokhale offered to brief PolCouns following Kim's visit.

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Four-Way Talks: Agree To Informal, Initial Meeting

15. (C) Turning to the proposal for an informal, senior officials level (U.S.-India-Japan-Australia) discussion on the margins of the ASEAN Regional Forum Senior Officials Meeting in Manila in late May, Gokhale said India supported such a format and now awaited a proposal on the format and agenda from Japan. Gokhale agreed with PolCouns on the need to proceed cautiously on this first meeting so as not to alarm regional neighbors, but also agreed that the agenda should be substantive enough to convince those involved on the benefits of subsequent meetings. Gokhale said the agenda should not include core security issues.

KAESTNER